

# Foreign Language Professional Communicative Competence as a Component of the Academic Science Teacher's Professional Competence

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The urgency of the problem raised in the article is explained by the increasing demand for qualified specialists who have a good command of a foreign language. The communicative competence of an academic science teacher under the conditions of international cooperation development is of great importance. The article discusses the problem of developing the foreign language communicative competence of academic science researchers and lecturers within the framework of international education and integration into the united European educational area. The research methods are studying and summarizing innovative pedagogical experience, reviewing the results of educational activities of academic science teachers in the sphere of improving the foreign language communicative competence which allow to reveal the status of this scientific problem in the pedagogical theory and practice. The article describes a project aimed at development of the foreign language communicative competence – a system of personal characteristics and skills – which creates perfect conditions to encourage educational and scientific activities of academic science teachers. The materials of this article may be of use to higher school lecturers and researchers who are interested in mastering their foreign language skills to develop their foreign language communicative competence.

**Keywords:** academic science teacher, higher education, foreign language professional communicative competence, foreign languages

## INTRODUCTION

### Urgency of the problem

The quality of work of the Russian professional higher education institutions

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nowadays is greatly influenced by the extended international cooperation. Russian universities have to participate actively in image-building events (education exhibitions, conferences) representing Russia abroad. They have to create the intercultural space and demonstrate high academic mobility of their students and academic teaching staff.

The importance of interlanguage communication in all its realizations (internationalization of European education standards, developing the quality of foreign language teaching, increased requirements to translation in different professional spheres, etc.) is increasing today. The social mandate has changed: the Russian society requires specialists who have a good command of a foreign language, who can use it in different spheres: professional, intellectual, emotional, receptive and creative ones (Panfilova, Panfilov & Merzon, 2015). The theory and practice of modern education have to be modified: the foreign language professional communicative competence is becoming the most important quality of modern scientists (Valeeva et al, 2015).

A modern scientist is a creative individual who can work with a large amount of information in a foreign language, who is able to analyze this information and to use the necessary one effectively in his professional activities. This requires an excellent knowledge of one or several foreign languages. There are different international cooperation programs giving professors and researchers a possibility to exchange their educational experience, to take part in international research projects, to lecture at foreign universities. Fluency in a foreign language and knowledge of the field-related vocabulary is a necessary condition of such activities. It is important to note that the Russian education system has to become more competitive on the global education market. One of the tasks of the system is to increase the number of foreign students studying at Russian universities. In addition to the above we have to improve the level of English speaking competency of Russian students to encourage their mobility both in the educational sphere and on the job market, which are becoming more international. Due to the increased number of joint educational projects it is necessary to teach some of the university subjects in English. Thus, foreign language professional communicative competence of lecturers and professors of higher education institutions is becoming of great significance (Gurie, 2008a; Safonova, 1993; Abdurazyakova, 2010; Zhukova, 1982).

## Research hypothesis

The level of foreign language professional communicative competence of the Russian academic science teachers unfortunately comes short of satisfactory. Their skills are based on the language education which they get studying at school and university. However, inadequate standards of school language teaching, ineffective teaching techniques, and low motivation mean that language teaching at school does not provide for development of foreign language competence. As a result most teachers are not able to communicate in English in their professional field. The teachers' unsatisfactory knowledge of foreign languages results in restrictions on acceptance of foreign students to Russian universities and holds back massive direct cooperation of scientists with their university counterparts from abroad.

Taking into consideration modern requirements to develop foreign language professional communicative competence of the academic teaching staff, Advanced Training Faculties offer courses of foreign languages. Their aim is to master professional vocabulary and develop communication skills. It is noteworthy to mention that learning a foreign language requires overcoming serious psychological barriers. There are many stereotypes connected with language learning, such as poor language abilities, age restrictions, poor memory, etc. Strong motivation, determination, effective teaching techniques are necessary to get quick results and

to start using a foreign language in professional activities (Gurie, 2008b; Solovova, 2004).

The analysis of the theoretical material and practical experience connected with the problem under discussion has shown that the issues of developing foreign language professional communicative competence of the academic teaching staff of higher educational institutions are a little-investigated field of the scientific research and practical activities. This allowed to develop a hypothesis of the research: language teaching of the academic staff of higher educational institutions will be effective if it is improved by means of a system of problem-related foreign language culturological tasks aimed at developing intellectual-cognitive, mental, and emotional growth of an individual.

## **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **The goal and tasks of the research**

In connection with the problem stated above a series of events was organized within the framework of the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University (KFU) and the Program of Strategic Development of the Vyatka State University of Humanities (VatGGU). The events were aimed at developing foreign language professional communicative competence of the academic staff in scientific communication.

The main aim of these events is to create the conditions to develop foreign language professional communicative competence and a number of individual qualities which help to advance the educational and scientific process as it provides for psychologically appropriate interaction in professional scientific communication in a foreign language as well as for improvement of skills to use this competence in scientific research.

The main tasks were: 1) to develop a comprehensive strategic teaching staff motivation and stimulus program aimed at increasing the effectiveness of foreign language professional communicative competence in educational, scientific research and project activities; 2) to support intercultural communication in the professional field; 3) to carry out theoretical and empirical research in a foreign language and to test its results in the professional and scientific activity; 4) to increase mobility of the university academic teaching staff.

### **Theoretical and empirical methods**

To test the hypothesis a series of mutually reinforcing methods was used:

- theoretical methods – surveying of publications on the research problem; studying and summarizing innovative pedagogical experience;
- empirical methods – participant observation, testing, questioning, studying the results of the learning activity of the academic teaching staff.

### **Stages of the research**

There were four stages of the research:

At the first stage of the research it was necessary to carry out an assessment of possibilities for development of the foreign language professional communicative competence of the academic staff in correspondence with the outside and internal environment and facilities of the universities; a testing site at the premises of the Kazan Federal University and Vyatka State University of Humanities was created; training programs, educational and thematic programs of professionally-motivating education of the academic teaching staff were developed.

At the second stage of the research an integrated strategic program aimed at increasing the effectiveness of foreign language professional communicative competence was developed, the necessary documentation was drawn up and candidates to participate in the project were selected.

The third stage of the research is a pilot project (a qualification upgrading course of 120 academic hours) aimed at development of the foreign language professional communicative competence of the academic teaching staff. Within the framework of the project teachers were taught to prepare and write articles in English for international journals, to make presentations and reports in English to be able to participate in international conferences.

Using the results of the pilot project, taking into consideration the problems we faced, we upgraded and improved some methods and pedagogical principles of foreign language teaching and then a further education program (704 academic hours) was tested at the forth stage of the research. Testing and systemizing of some factors was also carried out taking into account the aims of our university. Within the framework of the further education program the learners were taught to prepare and write scientific articles in English for international scientific journals, to make presentations and reports in English, to work with scientific sites to prepare applications for international research grants.

## Description of the research

Having analyzed publications about studies and development of foreign language communicative competence we have come to the conclusion that there is no unanimously accepted definition of the term “foreign language communicative competence”, and that opinions about its components are different. According to E. P. Abdurazyakova, foreign language communicative competence is a certain proficiency level of communication “techniques”, knowledge of communication standards, behavioral stereotypes, and results of education. It is an ability of a professional to function as a secondary linguistic identity in a variety of socially determined situations, one’s readiness to intercultural exchange. One should note that the recent decades have seen an increased interest in the problem of foreign language communicative competence and defining its components (Abdurazyakova, 2010; Fahrutdinova, Yarmakeev & Fakhrutdinov, 2014; Mukhametzyanova & Shayakhmetova, 2014).

A member of intercultural communication should have a high level of foreign language communicative competence, the peculiarity of which in comparison with communication in Russian is in a special way of mastering the material and the specific psychological mechanisms involved (consciousness of speech acts, state of uncertainty and anxiety).

The work carried out during the project aimed at development and improvement of such key components of foreign language communicative competence as *linguistic* competence, language competence, socio-cultural competence, discourse competence, educational and cognitive competence, strategic competence. Below we shall enlarge on each of the competences.

1. *Language* competence – are speech skills (dialogue and monologue speech), listening, reading and writing skills. To reach the set aims different training resources were used: English textbooks; training aids designed by the teaching staff of the university for individual self-guided work of the learners; practice classes; scientific research; audio and video materials which allow to listen to authentic English speech improving the learners’ pronunciation, on the one hand, and mastering listening skills, on the other; computer programs and the Internet which are necessary to develop computer competence and to offer individual or distance learning opportunities. These programs are particularly effective for written

communication skills which are currently the weakest link in our practice of academic and professional communication (Titova, 2004; Solovova, 2004).

2. *Linguistic competence* – knowledge of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar as well as graphics and spelling. The learner has a linguistic competence if he has an idea about the system of the language and can use it in practice. The level of skills and knowledge to a large extent depends on the corresponding learning in the Russian language. In Noam Chomsky's theory, linguistic competence defines the ability of an individual to understand and produce with the help of linguistic means and rules an indefinite number of sentences which are grammatically correct (Chomsky, 1972). To develop linguistic competence of the academic teaching staff the following means were used: charts, diagrams, handouts, illustrations which help to maximally individualize and promote the process of development of skills and abilities of all kinds of speech activity and also help the learners to memorize language and speech units; audio and video materials; computer programs and the Internet.

3. *Sociocultural competence* – socio-cultural knowledge about the countries of the target language (as well as behavior and etiquette standards) and skills to use this knowledge in foreign language communication, as well as skills to represent one's own country and its culture. Knowledge of the Russian culture, the culture of the target language countries, their differences and similarities, and the ability to use this knowledge in real intercultural communication situations are important components of cross-cultural competence. To effectively develop the sociocultural competence such an educational medium as immersion into the virtual space – the Internet – was used, besides, audio and video materials containing cross-cultural information were also employed in the learning process.

4. *Discourse competence* – an ability to understand another person and to reach coherence of independent utterances in meaningful communication models. The discourse component of the foreign language communicative competence is defined as an ability to construct discourse, that is to use and interpret forms and meanings of words to construct texts, to be able to organize the linguistic material into a coherent text, as well as to be able to use cohesion means. Thus, an individual with a high level of the discourse competence knows how to effectively use linking means (pronouns, conjunctions, adverbs, and other grammatical means), how to reach the congruity of thought and text, how to express the relationship between different ideas (Russian and contrastive-comparative philology: Linguoculturological aspect, 2004). To develop discourse competence the following means were used: English textbooks, audio and video materials computer programs and the Internet.

5. *Educational-cognitive competence* – general and special training skills, methods and techniques of independent learning of languages and cultures including the use of new information technologies. To develop educational-cognitive competence the following means were used: different dictionaries (English-Russian, Russian-English, monolingual), English textbooks, manuals, computer programs and the Internet.

6. *Strategic competence* – is an ability of the speaker to use verbal and non-verbal strategies to compensate for the lack of knowledge of the linguistic code (Geihman, 2003). It means the speaker should be able to use verbal and non-verbal communicative techniques to compensate for the lack of knowledge of grammar rules, to enhance the rhetoric effect of a speech message or to make a pause in the process of communication. The strategic component means the ability to balance the lack of linguistic knowledge, as well as the lack of foreign language speech and social experience, in the process of communication. A variety of audio and video materials were used to develop the strategic competence.

There is no doubt that only close interaction of all the components of the foreign language communicative competence in the process of acquiring linguistic,

sociocultural and cross-cultural knowledge and skills will ensure the development of communication skills in the main kinds of speech activity.

In the course of conducting projects to enhance foreign language communicative competence of the academic teaching staff, special attention was given to building-up the learners' knowledge of modern multimedia education technologies, they were acquainted with some computer English language training programs, principles of modern electronic dictionaries and translation systems, as well as Internet resources for learning English.

Computer programs, which include audio and video supplements to texts and functions monitoring the learners' progress, are the most effective, in our opinion. One of these programs is "Bridge to English". It give an opportunity to improve listening and pronunciation skills, enlarge vocabulary, do grammar exercises of varying degrees of complexity. The academic teaching staff of the Vyatka State Humanities University use in their learning English-Russian, Russian-English electronic dictionaries and translation systems. The most useful ones are Multitran, Lingvo ([www.multitran.ru](http://www.multitran.ru), [www.lingvo.ru](http://www.lingvo.ru), [www.yourdictionary.com](http://www.yourdictionary.com)), the translation systems: Prompt, Stylus, Sokrat.

As the academic teaching staff of our university participate more actively in different grants to study at foreign universities, international English language exams are becoming of high significance. The learners worked with the site [www.toefl.ru](http://www.toefl.ru) which contains detailed information about TOEFL exam and its testing procedure, as well as necessary materials for preparation.

Special attention was paid to the process of preparing and writing scientific articles in English as teachers more often participate in different scientific conferences. One of the main foreign publication requirements is good, full and clear representation of the material for a wide readership. In addition, it is required that the article is written in a good language (English, as a rule) and the article has to conform to specific requirements, which can be partly found in the 'rules for authors' sections, and partly in special literature on the scientific style. To prepare and write a quality scientific article in a foreign language (in English in particular) you have to know and comply with the requirements of foreign scientific publications, namely, how to make a proper abstract, choose keywords, construct the introduction, the body of the article, the conclusion, and make references. An important condition for a successful preparation of an article in English is also the willingness of a scientist to creatively use the linguistic means, namely, specific phrases, grammar structures used in different linguistic situations. Everything mentioned above is reached by means of problem-related foreign language culturological tasks developed by the project instructors and aimed at improving the foreign language professional communicative competence of the academic teaching staff.

## RESULTS

In the process of teaching a foreign language to the academic teaching staff of the Kazan Federal University and Vyatka State Humanities University an integrated program was developed and implemented in the education process. The main task of the program was to improve the basic professionally significant knowledge of a foreign language and motivate the staff to acquire such knowledge.

The syllabus of each course of the further education program "Foreign language" is close to practice and implements the principle of professional foreign language motivation.

The process of developing the foreign language professional communicative competence of the academic teaching staff of the Kazan Federal University and the

Vyatka State Humanities University took account of the specific character of foreign language training and was based on the following pedagogic principles:

- defining the components of the foreign language communicative competence on the basis of analysis of the corresponding professional field;
- step-by-step development of the foreign language communicative competence;
- intensification of the process of development of the foreign language communicative competence;
- immersion into the foreign language environment by means of conferences, role and business games, reading authentic literature.

Correspondence of the kinds and techniques of learning activities with the set tasks was taken into consideration when choosing the methods to develop the foreign language professional communicative competence of the academic teaching staff of the Kazan Federal University and the Vyatka State Humanities University. Particular competence methods, kinds and techniques of learning activities were carefully selected. They had not only an educational but also living justification, furthermore, development of the competences of the learners depended on the efforts they made. The following competence technologies were used in the process of foreign language education: project-based learning; development of critical thinking by reading and writing, method of debate, game technology (language games, role-playing games), panel sessions, interactive education technology (in pairs, small groups).

The competence approach requires from the learner not acquire knowledge but to be able to solve problems, so the technologies used in development of the foreign language professional communicative competence were practice-based which made it possible to train the learner's ability to act and solve professional tasks.

Summarizing the above, it should be noted that consideration of these aspects has increased the efficiency of the educational process and contributed to successful development of the foreign language communicative competence of the academic teaching staff of the Kazan Federal University and the Vyatka State Humanities University.

As a result an integrated strategic program of development of the foreign language professional communicative competence of the academic teaching staff of the Kazan Federal University and the Vyatka State Humanities University was carried out: 80 teachers from KFU and 60 teachers from VSHU participated in the program and improved their foreign language professional communicative competence. The participants of the program worked out general educational programs in English for foreign students and implemented the programs in the education process. Mobility of the academic teaching staff has increased (participation in international conferences, symposiums, seminars with reports in English; lecturing at foreign universities; international grants), publication activity in international scientific journals has also increased.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The necessity to develop the foreign language professional communicative competence of the academic teaching staff is discussed in many research papers (Safonova, 1993; Zimnyaya, 1991; Zhukova; 1982; Shcherba, 2002) and regulatory documents (the materials of the European Commission "Key Competences for Europe", State Education Standards 1996; Michalewicz, 2000).

In any sphere of professional activity one may have a compelling need to establish business contacts with colleagues from other countries. This will allow them to get to a new professional level, develop their ideas in accordance with the world experience, as well as to present their ideas on a foreign market (Zhukova, 1982). Analysis of different points of view on the professional communicative

competence has shown that it is defined as "the ability and willingness to implement foreign language communication according to the requirements of the program, which, in their turn, depend on a set of language-specific knowledge and skills such as linguistic means and processes of speech production and recognition; grammar skills and knowledge; lexical knowledge and skills (taking into account sociocultural vocabulary minimum); orthographic knowledge and skills; pronunciation skills and listening comprehension skills, as well as an additional element – an ability to achieve mutual understanding to overcome a linguistically difficult situation, etc." (Geihman, 2003).

## CONCLUSION

Radical changes in the Russian society in the last decade, namely, opening the state borders, increased mobility, development of modern information technologies are reflected in the system of higher education and, in particular, in the foreign language training of academic teachers. Foreign language training not only equips the learners with knowledge and develops skills and abilities, but also contributes to the formation of a new type of the language identity, the qualities of which are determined by the requirements of the society, these qualities are a priority objective of the educational process and are taken into account when drafting higher education standards, providing for the increased level of professionally oriented foreign language communicative training of both students and academic science teachers.

The academic teaching staff of the Kazan Federal University and the Vyatka State Humanities University have improved their foreign language professional communicative competence by means of the further education program. The teachers take an active part in international conferences and make scientific reports in English; actively publish their research results in English in international scientific journals; thus, the *Science Citation Index* has been increasing steadily. A good command of a foreign language, no doubt, contributes to improving the quality of professional-pedagogical activity of the academic science teacher, as well as the competitive ability of the higher education system as a whole.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

A system of foreign culturological tasks, principles of their selection and their implementation in practice can be effectively used to develop the foreign language professional communicative competence of professionals in any field; to develop programs and study guides in a foreign language. The materials of this article may be of use to higher school lecturers and researchers who are interested in consistent mastering their foreign language skills to develop their foreign language communicative competence.

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